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ABSTRACT

It is suggested that although counselors tend to direct services to the middle class, they do so most forcibly toward the white collar middle class. The blue collar worker is typically not included in consideration of the delivery of services to alienated sub-cultures. There are numerous and different demands placed on the blue collar worker in our changing society which are not understood or experienced by the white collar professionals, such as counselors. For example, the force of technological change is more severely felt by the blue collar worker than by the white collar professional. The typical systems of delivering counseling to the blue collar worker are oriented towards solving present problems of unemployment or the threat of such. There seem to be no general services available to assist these individuals to achieve a satisfying and rewarding life. Alternate sources and delivery systems to more nearly meet this need are examined. (Author)

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COUNSELING AND THE BLUE COLLAR CULTURE[1]

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In recent years there has been a tremendous amount of literature in the field of counseling concerning working with the disadvantaged and the alienated. This literature reflects a great deal of concern about value systems and a rather common recognition that since counselors are predominantly from the middle class our services tend to be directed toward the middle class, and that whenever we operate outside this area of safety we must avoid imposing our value systems. However, I would like to submit that not only do we tend to direct our services to the middle class, we do so most forcibly toward the white collar middle class.

For example, there currently are rumblings eminating from administrative and governmental circles to the effect that secondary school counselors are not giving proper attention to the career development of non-college-bound students.

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[1]Part of a symposium entitled "The Test of Relevancy for the Counseling Profession: Alienated Subcultures" presented at the 1971 annual meeting of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, Atlantic City, New Jersy, sponsored by ARCA, April 6, 1971.

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I would also suspect that bright youngsters are often prodded to attend college whether they want to go or not, because our values dictate that college is the path which leads to happiness.

The word "alienation" connotes estrangement from the norm or from the dominant group. We white collar professionals constitute a distinct minority, yet have the temerity to assume that we set the standards of behavior. A cogent question at this point, I believe, is "who is alienated from whom?" A plausible answer to this question has been advanced by Arbuckle (1969) who contends that in many situations it is the counselor who is alienated from the client.

In considering the possibility of the counselor being alienated from the blue collar worker we must remember the one word which has been especially descriptive of the world of work during the past half-century. This word is "change,"and all indications for the future are that automation and technological change will continue at an ever accelerated speed. The white collar middle class professional is faced to some degree with change within his profession. For example, the physician or the counselor need to keep abreast of new procedures and discoveries. But--the physician or counselor are not likely to have their jobs phased out in the near future. We are not likely to be faced with re-training. The blue collar

worker, however, is the one who is feeling the full force of this technological explosion. We counselors, then, are protected from feeling this impact, and in this sense are alienated from forces which have tremendous meaning to the worker.

Another factor which contributes to the blue collar worker experiencing change in the face of our increasingly technological society is the creation of leisure time. We professionals supposedly derive satisfaction from our work. However, as Gellman (1964) has stated, "many workers no longer find work satisfaction within the plant and seek its functional equivalent in the non-industrial environment." This is yet another area of concern from which we professionals are somewhat removed.

In what ways do we deliver counseling services to the blue collar worker? Characteristically, this is done through community vocational guidance services such as: the United States Employment Service and its related Manpower and Development programs; the Vocational Rehabilitation and Education Service of the Veterans Administration; state divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation; local departments of public assistance; and voluntary agencies sponsored by community or national organizations, such as the Jewish Vocational Service. There is also some interest shown by industry in vocational counseling for workers, but I

would suspect that this in management oriented and not client oriented.

These organizations are necessary and each have made a significant contribution. However, as Gellman (1964) has pointed out, the work of these agencies is "oriented toward present problems." That is, they deal with individuals who face unemployment or the threat of unemployment. I would submit that this is not enough. In what ways do we help workers to live a more satisfying life? How do people learn to enjoy leisure? How do we assist workers to deal with disintegrating marriages? How do we help the individual withstand what Wolfbein (1964) calls "the onslaughts" of life, and in fact, take advantage of the inevitable changes in the world of work?

There seem to be several directions in which the counseling profession can move which could tend to alleviate some of the problems inherent in our changing world. First, school systems need to expand the role of counseling from the traditional high school guidance model. More energy should be spent in pre-high school occupational orientation, and the dignity of all work should be emphasized to a greater degree. Several states are currently developing programs designed to more nearly meet this need, and this trend should be encouraged. Secondly, counselors need to become

increasingly involved in community psychology and community mental health programs. Voluntary agencies need to become involved beyond solving immediate problems of unemployment. However, I see the most significant move toward making counseling relevant to the blue collar worker coming from those organizations which have always had the welfare of the worker as their reason for existance: the labor unions. Unions traditionally strive for higher pay and better working conditions. Perhaps it is time they became more interested in building a more satisfying and personally rewarding life for the worker. It seems that the Unions have done a good job of satisfying the basic needs of financial security and safe working conditions, and there is a trend toward concern for the worker's higher order needs. However, this concern must assume an increasingly central position if the Unions are to continue as a relevant social force.

Where does the counseling profession fit into this picture? I would think that, first of all, we can be instrumental in developing awareness of this need. Beyond this, however, the image does not focus so easily. Do we invade the unions with a great influx of professionally trained counselors? If so, do we continue to promulgate the traditional one-to-one counseling paradigm as the basic delivery system of our services? Or should we, rather, function as consultants, or as translators of psychological expertise?

Perhaps none of these roles will be appropriate, but I believe that we stand on the threshold of tremendous opportunity for professional relevance in a changing world, and we must hope that we have the flexibility and courage to meet the challenge.

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